SFExaminer, 5*R ed 20 Aug 71

Mexico Escapee May Be Here

CAR. PLANE IN SPY THRILLER

SFExaminer S*R AUG 20 1971

MYSTERY MAN OF MEXICAN JAILBREAK
Is Joel David Kaplan a CIA agent?
—AP Photo

Fugitive May Be in Sausalito

Plane Bought In a Hurry

By Jane Eshleman Conant

The cloak-and-dagger escape of mystery man Joel David Kaplan from a Mexico City jail, reportedly to Sausalito, may have been engineered by the Central Intelligence Agency, according to speculation in various quarters today.

And it was an urgent affair, The Examiner learned.

The pilot who flew the 45 year old New Yorker out of Mexico, and allegedly to the Bay Area, tried to acquire the getaway plane "in a big hurry" on Sunday, Aug. 8.

'A Little Funny'

He went to a Southern California aircraft sales firm and said he "had to be in Albuquerque the next day," the sales manager said, adding:

"He came on too strong. The owner thought there was something a little funny about it and turned him down."

The pilot, identified as Victor E. Stadler, then went to another Southern California sales agency, it was learned. There, he traded his own old two-engine Cessna 310 for the newer, single-engine Cessna 210 in which the escape flight was completed.

His wife said today he is "out of town — where he is, I don't know."

CIA Connection

She declined to discuss the matter "until my husband is here with me," but said she has no idea when he will return.

Meantime, Kaplan's attorney, Victor Velazquez, said in Mexico City that it is "a well known fact" that the fugitive was a CIA agent.

"He didn't try to hide it," Velazquez said.

He said Kaplan had openly acknowledged he had done work for the CIA, and added:

"I often wondered what might have motivated him, and a member of his family told me it was his spirit of adventure."

The attorney insisted he didn't know who helped Kaplan and a cellmate flee the Mexican jail by helicopter Wednesday night. But his remarks led to speculation that it was a CIA "rescue mission."

Whether Kaplan was actu-

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A CIA Touch To Jailbreak

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ally brought to Sausalito remained a mystery.

Spy Role?

The federal attorney general's office in Mexico City said he reached the Marin County bayshore town, but did not elaborate.

Police there said they knew nothing about it. An FBI spokesman in San Francisco said "We don't have anything on it at this time. We are looking into it."

Meanwhile there was all sorts of talk about Kaplan's possible spy role, and his part in an alleged "murder-that-didn't-take-place" near Mexico City in 1961.

Attorney Velazquez said he is a nephew of J. M. Kaplan of New York, founder of the J. M. Kaplan Fund, incorporated in Delaware in 1944 as a tax-exempt charity.

CIA Cover

The House tax subcommittee of Rep. Wright Patman said some years ago that the Kaplan Fund was a "financial cover for the disbursement of CIA funds."

There were possible CIA overtones in the asserted murder of which Kaplan was convicted, and for which he was serving a sentence in the Marta Acatitla Prison, Mexico City.

He was arrested after a body identified as that of Luis Melchior Vidal, a Puerto Rico-born American businessman, was found beside a road south of Mexico City in 1961.

Velazquez and Kaplan argued that the body was not that of Vidal, who, they claimed, had been involved in a deal to provide arms to persons hoping to overthrow "dictatorships" in Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Fled to Cuba

The deal collapsed because the CIA put in its oar, the attorney alleged. He said Vidal fled Mexico to Cuba and was not murdered, by Kaplan or anyone else.

Kaplan and his cellmate, Carlo Antonio Contreras, 24, a Venezuelan, were plucked from a yard behind their jail dormitory Wednesday night by a helicopter painted in the blue and white colors of the Mexican attorney general's office.

Prison guards, it was reported, thought it was an official plane and presented arms as it landed.

Kaplan and Contreras ran from the jail, got aboard and were whisked away.

The federal attorney general's office said the helicopter took the men to La Pesca, a fishing village on the Gulf Coast some 300 miles northeast of Mexico City.

There, the office said, Kaplan was put into a Cessna 210 with the numbers N9462-X and was flown to Brownsville, Tex., and thence to Marin County.

Contreras boarded another Cessna, No. N9364-X, and was believed taken to Guatemala.

The official spokesman said the helicopter was flown by Roger Gary Herschner, 29, of Glendora, Los Angeles County. The Cessna which allegedly picked up Kaplan was piloted by Stadler, he declared.

Neither could be located immediately.

The Mexico authorities said the helicopter had been rented from the "Natrola Service," of Casper, Wyo. This turned out to be the Natrona Service, a mineral claims survey firm operated by John McGuire.

A Natrona spokesman said the helicopter, a Bell four-seater — "a small one" — was sold, not rented, about 10 days ago.

It was "surplus equipment," the spokesman said, adding that records were not immediately available to show to whom it was sold.

Meantime, in Mexico City, Maj. Juan Tovia Martinez, chief of security at the prison; his assistant, Andres Duenas Sosa, and five subordinates were held for investigation. Those whose negligence contributed to the escape will receive "the strongest punishment," authorities said.

Also in Mexico City today, police made a formal request to the United States FBI to arrest Kaplan.